

“The Glory Days” (Genesis 1:1-25)

Several years ago a movie was released entitled *Back to the Future*. In the movie an old professor designed a car that could be set for a certain date. By driving at a certain speed the professor could break the time barrier and arrive at that date. Although the driver of the car could be living in 1997, he could set the date for 1950 or 2020, drive the right speed, and arrive at that date. The idea was that 1950 or 2020 or 1997 or any date all occurred simultaneously if the time barrier were broken. But God has not just broken the time barrier; He lives without one because He is eternal.¹ He is also outside of space and time. Admittedly, it is mind-bogglingly difficult to understand a God like this.

As we continue our study through the creation account, it is important to recognize the truth of God’s words expressed in Isaiah 55:8-9: “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Unless we can first agree with the above assessment, we will struggle through the first two chapters of Genesis. Yet, this is not God’s intent. Rather, we are to pursue the God of creation as He reveals Himself in Genesis.

As we enter back into the fray of Genesis 1, we need to remember a few important truths. (1) Genesis doesn’t tell us everything we want to know; it tells us everything we need to know. Moses, the author of Genesis, selectively chooses what we need to know about who God is and what He has done. We will try to answer questions that are of particular interest to the author. (2) The book of Genesis is a part of the Pentateuch, which means one book in five parts. The Pentateuch encompasses Genesis-Deuteronomy. All five books nicely fit together as a single book. The wise reader will look for similar and dissimilar threads woven throughout the book. (3) The book of Genesis is 3,500 years old. This means it has been working effectively to change people’s lives for a long time. It continues to change lives today.

Before we look at 1:3-25, it is worth summarizing 1:1-2. I understand Genesis 1:1 to teach that God created the entire universe during a period of time referred to as “in the beginning.” Genesis 1:1 tells us, in very clear and straightforward terms, that time and history had a beginning.² At some point in the past, God created creation.³ God made creation for our good and for His glory. This creation reaches its conclusion in Revelation 21:1, with a new earth (cf. Isa 65:17). Genesis 1:2 then narrows the scope from the universe to the earth or more specifically the land of Eden. Verse 2 tells us that the land was uninhabitable for mankind. While God could have instantaneously created the land as it is, for whatever reason, He did not choose to do so. Now in 1:3-25, we will discover how God prepared the land for the first man and woman (see Isa 45:18).⁴

If you’re wondering how I made the jump from the “earth” to the “land,” let me explain. We must be careful not to fill up ancient words with modern meanings. When we hear the word “earth” in our scientific age, we generally think of the big jewel we are on which orbits around the sun. But the term did not generally suggest such a meaning to those in the pre-space-age time when Genesis was written, for they did not generally know of the “global” dimensions of the planet.⁵ Thus, the term “earth,” (*eretz*) in Genesis, does not usually refer to the entire planet, but to a specific section of land.⁶

It is also worth noting that Genesis 2 shows that the focus of Genesis 1 is “the land.” It was a common literary strategy of the Hebrews to give a general description of an event followed by a more specific account of that same event.⁷ In this case, Genesis 1 gives a general overview of God’s work, and Genesis 2 gives a more specific look at that same work. This seems evident even from a quick reading of the chapters. So it seems that both chapters are about the *same events* viewed from *different perspectives*. Since the setting of chapter two is clearly a localized section of land, and not the entire planet, it follows that the six days of chapter one concern a localized segment of land and not the entire planet or universe.

Before closely examining this passage, it is worth seeing the forest from the trees. Therefore, let me suggest three elements that stand out. First, the single most obvious point of Genesis 1 is that God is the subject of all these verses. Everything else is an object. Objects are acted upon. Light, air, water, dry land, vegetation, sun, moon, stars, fish, birds, and land animals—all are objects in a creative process where God alone is subject. In these verses we are told that God “**saw**” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), “**separated**” (1:4, 7), “**called**” (1:5, 8, 10), “**made**” (1:7, 16, 25), “**placed**” (1:17), “**created**” (1:21, 27), and explained to the man and woman what He had done (1:28-30). Moreover, before that, God spoke (1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20), as a result of which everything else unfolded.⁸

Second, note the two adjectives in 1:2, “formless” and “void.” The six days are divided into two triads, one referring to the first adjective, how the earth received its form, and the other to the second, how the fullness came to be. So days 1-3 remedy the situation of “formlessness,” and days 4-6 deal with the state of “void.” Mark the symmetry here with each part commencing with light.⁹

The Symmetry of Genesis

Form	Fullness
Day 1: Light (1:3-5)	Day 4: Lights (1:14-19)
Day 2: Air (1:6-8)	Day 5: Birds (1:20-23)
Day 2: Water (1:6-8)	Day 5: Fish (1:20-23)
Day 3: Land (1:9-13)	Day 6: Animals (1:24-31)
Day 3: Plants (1:9-13)	Day 6: Man (1:24-31)

Summary: In three days God made the uninhabitable land productive, and in three more days He filled the uninhabited land with life.

Third, Moses’ description of the six creative days follows a particular pattern as this chart indicates.¹⁰

The Parallels of the Six Days of Preparation

PREPARATION PHRASE	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6
“God said, ‘Let there be’”	1:3	1:6	1:9	1:14	1:20	1:24
“And it was so”	1:3	1:7	1:9	1:15	-----	1:24
“God saw that it was good”	1:4	-----	1:12	1:18	1:21	1:25
“God called”	1:5	1:8	1:10	-----	-----	-----
“There was evening and there was morning, ___ day”	1:5	1:8	1:13	1:19	1:23	1:31

Now that we have set the overarching context and clues, we are ready to contemplate the six days of preparation. First, “**God said, ‘Let there be...and it was so.’**” God does not “make” on every day, but He does “speak” on every day. Ten times God speaks!¹¹ When I speak it is not nearly as effective. When I say it’s time for bed that is not always translated into my children all tucked in quietly. When I’m driving a bucket of golf balls and say this drive is going 200 yards, it doesn’t always wind up there. But when God spoke, things happened. This has always been the case down throughout history, which is really History. This is a powerful reminder that everything that God says can be trusted, including John 6:47.

Second, **“God saw that it was good.”** Everything that God made that was beneficial for humans, He called “good.” God loved His work.

Third, **“God called.”** God named the things He created. The act of giving a name meant the exercise of a sovereign right (cf. 41:45; 2 Kgs 24:17; Dan 1:17).

Lastly, **“There was evening and there was morning, ___ day.”** It is possible that the order of evening-morning in “And there was evening, and there was morning, one day” (cf. Gen 1:8, 13, 19, 23, 31) reflects the Hebrew concept of the day beginning with sunset and ending with the following sunset. Regardless, this informs us that He prepared and ordered the land of Eden over a six-day period.

Day 1 (1:3-5): “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day,¹² and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” Since the sun, moon, and stars were included in the phrase “heavens and the earth” (1:1), 1:3 describes the appearance of the sun through the darkness. The division between “the day” and “the night” leaves little room for an interpretation of the “light” in 1:3 as other than that of the sun.¹³ God brought forth the sun, moon, and stars on the first day and assigned them their specific functions on the fourth day (cf. 1:14-18). God began His work on Sunday with a sunrise, the same day that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. God loved you so much that He prepared a place for you.

Day 2 (1:6-8): “Then God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven.¹⁴ And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.” God’s work involves making divisions and distinctions. God showed His power again by putting limits on the waters of the earth (cf. Job 38:8-11). The **“expanse”** is a reference to the sky (cf. 1:8; 7:11-12; 2 Kgs 7:2; Ps 104:3; 148:4-6; Prov 8:28). The water above is a reference to clouds; the water below is a reference to the water of the earth. Moses states that God “made this.” The word **“make”** (*asa*, 1:7) is not the same word as “create” (*bara*). Two examples should suffice. Last week, Lori made whole wheat muffins. She created (*bara*) these muffins. But they were not suitable for her family. So she prepared (*asa*) the muffins by spreading butter and strawberry jam on them. Another example: Lori and I had the house we live in built (*bara*). But before we moved in, we furnished it (*asa*) so that it would be habitable.¹⁵ On a humorous note, it is worth noting that nothing is called “good” on Monday. Nothing was made for human life on that day.

Day 3 (1:9-13): “Then God said, ‘Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them’; and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day.” On the third day we see God carrying out two distinct acts: He prepares “the land and the seas,” and He furnishes the land with fruit trees. Unlike the work of the second day, both acts are called “good.” They are “good” because both were accomplished for mankind’s benefit. Both acts were related to the preparation of the Promised Land.¹⁶ In a second work of separation, land is separated from seas, just as in 1:6 waters were separated from waters. Vegetation is created immediately—“Let the land produce vegetation.” The productive power of the earth is a God-given gift. God controls the boundaries of the seas. Even more important for mankind was the provision, on the third day, of dry land, on which he could live, and plants to sustain life (cf. 1:29–30). The distinct varieties of plants (1:11–12) bear witness to God’s organizing power.

Day 4 (1:14-19): “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.” On the fourth day the lights that God had created were given a purpose, namely, “to separate the day from the night” and “to mark seasons and days and years.” These heavenly bodies were to serve as signs for seasons and days and years (1:14). How did we have days without the sun? How do you have animals and plants living without sunlight? God is explaining His creation in these verses. Don’t worship these things; I’ve made them! Worship Me!

Pagan contemporaries of Genesis regarded these bodies as gods in their own right. To avoid any suspicion that the sun and moon were anything but created by God, Genesis calls them just lights. They were appointed to regulate the fundamental rhythms of human life by defining day and night and the seasons of the year.¹⁷ In astrology people use stars and planets for guidance, but the Bible says they merely display the handiwork of God (Ps 19:1). What folly to follow astrological charts of the Babylonians or worship the sun god in Egypt; rather, one should trust the One who made these objects in the heavens. However, many humans repeatedly reject the Creator to worship the creation (Rom 1:25). G.K. Chesterton said, “It is most often supposed that when people stop believing in God, they believe in nothing. Alas, it is worse than that. When they stop believing in God, they believe in anything.”

The Bible also indicates several symbolic purposes for the creation of the celestial bodies. (1) *To demonstrate God’s faithfulness.* God’s promises for the survival and future glory of the nation of Israel are based upon the faithful witness in the sky (Ps 89:33-37; Jer 31:35-36).

(2) *To demonstrate God’s power.* God sustains the stars, calls them all by name, and has created them all (Ps 8:3-4; 147:4-5; Isa 40:25-26).

(3) *To demonstrate God’s coming judgment.* The prophet Joel spoke of a day when there would be signs in the heavens (Joel 2:30-31). The sun would be turned into darkness and the moon into blood “before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” The Gospels also speak of a coming day of judgment when “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matt 24:29; cf. Luke 21:25-28). These unusual events in the sun, moon, and stars point to God’s coming judgment.

(4) *To demonstrate God’s purpose.* Verse 14 speaks of the sun, moon, and stars being designed by God “for seasons.” The Hebrew word is used over 200 times in the Bible, and over half of these usages occur in the context of a gathering for worship. The word “seasons” points to celebration, feasts, and worship. In fact, the religious calendar of the Jewish people is based upon the visual changes of the moon. The seasons in 1:14 are designed to fulfill God’s purpose for His people; He wants us to worship Him.¹⁸

Day 5 (1:20-23): “Then God said, ‘Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.’ God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.” On the fifth day God populated the land with many kinds of living creatures (birds and fish). The word “created” (*bara*) is used to draw our attention back to 1:1. This serves to remind us that “in the beginning” God had created these creatures with which He is now populating the land.¹⁹

Each new step in the account is marked by the use of *bara*: the universe (1:1), the living creatures (1:21), and man (1:26). The primary interest of the author is to show the creation of all living creatures in three distinct groups: on the fifth day, sea creatures and sky creatures, and on the sixth day, land creatures.²⁰ This is the first time God “blesses” in the Bible. The word is used over 80 times in Genesis where it usually speaks of fertility. The earth is alive. He is a great God that blesses. God brought up out of the water the Promised Land (the Middle East). God is preparing the land as a gift for people.

Day 6 (1:24-25): “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind’; and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.” The “living creatures” are divided into three groups: “cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth.” God brings forth these creatures for man’s benefit.

First, we should be thankful for God’s creation. Most Christians express gratitude for God’s gift of salvation—and rightly so. But throughout the Scriptures there is a greater emphasis on expressing gratitude and worship for God’s creation. A great example of this is found in Revelation 4: God is to be praised just for being (4:8). Then He is to be praised for being the Creator (4:11). Before we can praise God for being our Savior, we must recognize that He is, first and foremost, our great Creator God. This causes us to see how big God really is.

Second, we should delight in God’s creation. God calls His creation good. There is beauty in creation. God is a great artist. God Himself enjoys the goodness of His creation (Ps 104; Prov 3:19; 8:22). If pagans worship nature in idolatry, we should worship God for it.²¹ God’s creation is amazingly diverse and is completely overwhelming to man. Why? Only a tiny fraction of all the species on earth (animals, plants, insects) have been discovered and named. Biologists have cataloged a total of between 1.5 million and 1.8 million species. Estimates of the true number of living species range, according to the method employed, from 3.6 million to more than 100 million. What is more astonishing is that scientists estimate that more than 95 percent of all the species that have ever existed are extinct! Two amazing examples of God’s infinite creativity: In one 2.5-acre area of Brazil’s rain forest, there are 425 kinds of trees. In one small corner of Peru’s Manu National Park, there are 1,300 butterfly species.²² We should delight in this. We should be awed by God’s beauty as revealed in creation.

Finally, we should demonstrate a responsibility toward creation.²³ The world is becoming dirty and ugly. The air is being turned into smog. The rivers are polluted. Toxic chemicals fill the soil. The oceans have become garbage dumps, trash is piling up on the edges of our cities, and oil spills pollute our beaches. All the while many Christians laugh at environmentalists. We must change our actions and attitudes. Maybe you feel like you don’t have the time to spend upholding the environment. Can you encourage someone who is involved? Are there little things you can do like be informed? Can you do your part?

How can we boil down this beautiful section of Scripture? By worshipping the God of creation and preparation. Tony Allen, one of our members, is a gifted photographer that put together the following slide show. Please watch this and worship the God of creation.

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Notes

¹ Anne Graham Lotz, *God's Story* (Nashville: Word, 1999 [1997]), xxi.

² The term “beginning” (*re'shith*) in biblical Hebrew marks a starting point of a specific duration as in “the beginning of the year” (*re'shit hashshannah*; Deut 11:12). The end of a specific period is marked by its antonym, “its end” (*'aharit*), as in Deuteronomy 11:12: “the end of the year” (lit. tr. of *'aharit shannah*). In opening the account of Creation with the phrase “in the beginning” (*bere'shith*), the author has marked Creation as the starting point of a period of time. John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis: Expositors Bible Commentary*, Electronic Ed.

³ As Galileo said, “The Bible tells us how to go to heaven not how the heavens go.”

⁴ “Think of the parallels. In the same way that God prepares a special place for Adam and Eve, a place they will be driven out of if they are disobedient, so too, He promises first Abraham, and then the whole nation of Israel a special place, that they will be driven out of if they are disobedient. In fact, both are sent the same direction, to the east, when they do disobey. And then, where will the Messiah come to? Exactly the same area as the first Adam lived! And where is the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 located? Just where God placed the first Jerusalem, which was in the same place that He created for Adam and Eve: Eden! In this view, the whole Bible ties together in a way that makes complete sense and has God wasting nothing as He prepares a land for His people.” See Rich Milne, *Genesis Unbound: A Review*: <http://www.probe.org/docs/genesis.html>.

⁵ The context of the creation account itself suggests that we are to interpret *eretz* in verse two as “land” and not “whole planet.” In Gen 1:10, “land” [*eretz*] is defined as the dry ground where Adam and Eve were to dwell as opposed to the seas. Sailhamer points out that “the ‘seas’ do not cover the ‘land,’ as would be the case if the term meant ‘earth.’ Rather the ‘seas’ lie adjacent to the ‘land’ and within it.” Further, “land” is defined by its contrast to the seas (1:10) and sky (1:20) not in contrast to the stars and planets as would be the case if “land” (*eretz*) was being used to mean “planet earth.” Thus, there is good precedent in the text to understand *eretz* in a restricted sense in 1:2. Consequently, since verse two refers to a certain piece of land and not the whole planet, the rest of the chapter, which describes God’s work on this land to make it inhabited, is not about the entire planet but a section of land within the planet. See Dr. John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 49.

⁶ Sometimes *eretz* does refer to the whole world (Gen 18:25). But most often it does not. Most of the time *eretz* (“earth”) refers to a localized segment of the planet, such as the “land of Egypt” (45:8), the “dry ground” (1:10), or the land promised to Abraham (15:18). In these cases, *eretz* is best translated as “land,” not “earth,” as many translations reflect.

⁷ For example, Genesis 10 gives a general description of the various nations according to their languages and countries, and then chapter 11 backs up to explain the origin of the various languages and countries.

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis 1-11 Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982 [1998]), 70.

⁹ Slightly revised from W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1985), 31.

¹⁰ This chart was revised from Paul Wright, ed., *Genesis: Shepherd's Notes* (Nashville: Broadman, 1997), 10.

¹¹ Just as He did with the Ten Commandments given to Moses (Exod 20:1-17).

¹² Regarding the word “day” (*yom*) several interpretations have been suggested. (1) The days of creation refer to extended geological ages prior to man’s presence on earth. (2) The days are 24-hour periods in which God *revealed* His creative acts. (3) They are literal 24-hour days of divine activity. In favor of the third view is the fact that the term *yom* with an ordinal (first, second, etc.) adjective means 24-hour days wherever this construction occurs in the Old Testament. Also the normal understanding of the fourth commandment (Exod 20:11) would suggest this interpretation. However, those that hold to long days argue that these are days of God’s activity not human work, therefore, it is unlikely that they are supposed to last twenty-four hours. Indeed, the Hebrew word for “day” covers a variety of periods: the hours of daylight (Gen 29:7), a twenty-four-hour day (Gen 7:4) or an indefinite period (Gen 35:3). That they were different from ordinary days is shown by the non-existence of the sun until the fourth day. Another hint that creation did not take six literal days is the mention of the creation of the heavens and the earth, i.e. the unorganized universe before the six days were counted down. It should be noted that 1:1–2:3, unlike all other sections of Genesis, is not headed by the title “This is the account of,” which links the proto-history (2:4–11:26) to the patriarchal history (11:27–50:26). All these differences indicate that 1:1–2:3 serves as an overture to the rest of the book and that it may not be intended to be taken as literally as what follows.

¹³ Geisler and Howe provide another attempt to answer this question. “How could there be light before the sun was made? The sun was not created until the fourth day, yet there was light on the first day (1:3). The sun is not the only source of light in the universe. Further, the sun may have existed from the first day, but only appeared or became visible (as the mist cleared) on the fourth day. We see light on a cloudy day, even when we can’t see the sun.” Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 30.

¹⁴ One Hebrew word designates heaven both as the place where God dwells and the place where birds fly. It is the second sense that is used here.

¹⁵ The word for “created” (*bara*) is used six times in the Creation account (1:1, 21, 27; 2:3). Elsewhere the word “to make” (*asa*) is used to describe God’s actions. *Asa* is used of cutting one’s fingernails (Deut 21:12), washing one’s feet (2 Sam 19:25), and trimming one’s beard (2 Sam 19:24). It can mean “to appoint” and “to acquire”; to put something in good order, to make right. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 107.

¹⁶ God prepares a chunk of real estate for the first two human beings. The land of Eden is chosen. For the first 1,600 years of human history, everyone lives in Eden. It isn’t until Genesis 11 that people scatter.

¹⁷ For a specific reason the moon is called (only here) the lesser light, and the sun is called (also only here) the greater light. Among Israel’s neighbors sun and moon were designations for deities. Not so in God’s world! In fact, they are not light proper, but carriers of the light. They are lamps, and their duties are spelled out to show their status as servants. They are not arbiters of man’s destiny.

¹⁸ David Hocking, *The Rise and Fall of Civilization* (Portland: Multnomah, 1989), 45-46.

¹⁹ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 141.

²⁰ Sailhamer, *Genesis: Expositors Bible Commentary*, Electronic Ed.

²¹ Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through The Bible: Genesis 1-11* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1997), 28-29.

²² Preaching Today Citation: Jerry De Luca, Montreal, Canada; source: *Time*, special Earth Day 2000 edition (Spring 2000).

²³ Revised from Boice, *Genesis 1-11*, 85-86.